HARD COPY IN CLEVELAND

By John Vacha

From a historian's point of view, Cleveland's first twenty-two years may be regarded as the Dark Ages. What dispelled much of the gloom was the appearance in 1818 of the city's first newspaper, the Cleaveland Gazette & Commercial Register. The coming of newspapers would raise the curtain on such vital concerns as civic progress, economic growth, and political sentiment, as well as such often overlooked but revelatory matters as arrivals and departures, fashions, amusements, and the prices of eggs and bacon.

Even the spelling of the city's name was finalized on the front page of a newspaper, though not according to popular legend. A folk version has it that the first "a" in Cleaveland was originally dropped by the Cleveland Herald in the 1830s in order to squeeze a new, slightly wider type font into its nameplate. (A computer could easily solve that problem nowadays, right?) Actually, the Cleveland Advertiser had beat the Herald to it in its very first issue of January 6, 1831, explaining that it simply considered the silent "a" to be superfluous.

New newspapers were cropping up on the banks of the Cuyahoga like dandelions in those days. Six appeared in 1841 alone, including the singularly-named but short-lived Eagle-Eyed News-Catcher. All it took was a flat-bed printing press, a few cases of type, an editor's desk--and, hopefully, the support of a political party. Whereas newspapers in later days would support political parties, back then parties supported newspapers. The Herald was Whig in political orientation as was Cleveland, which made it the city's dominant newspaper. It demonstrated its superiority in 1835 by becoming the city's first newspaper to appear on a daily basis, after which Cleveland has never been without a daily newspaper--at least until the present day. The Herald also was printing on a steam-powered press by 1845 and obtaining news by telegraph two years later.

It was as a weekly that the Cleveland Plain Dealer first appeared on January 7, 1842, using the plant of the recently defunct Advertiser. As a Democratic paper it lagged behind the morning Herald, becoming an evening daily only in 1845. Despite the fact that its politics relegated it to secondary status, the Plain Dealer nevertheless managed to produce Cleveland's first "star" reporter. He took the unprepossessing form of Charles Farrar Browne, a gangling, solemn-faced but lucid-eyed youth who came to the Plain Dealer via Tiffin and Toledo in 1858. Put in charge of the "City Facts and Fancies" column, he was frequently at a loss for newsworthy copy. "We thought we had seen dull times in the items line, but we just begin to discover that we hadn't," lamented Browne in mock desperation:

> Won't somebody "pizen" somebody? Won't somebody get mad and shoot a pistol at somebody?... Won't some man run off with another man's wife, previously.. .damaging the constitution of the husband? Won't some "cultivated young man of prepossessing appearance" go and lose all his money at poker and then drown himself? Won't nobody do nothing?

Browne finally decided to do something himself to fill the holes in his news columns. He invented an itinerant showman named Artemus Ward, who was wont on slow news days to send Browne letters describing, in fractured spelling and syntax, his misadventures on tour in the Midwest. "If you put this letter in the papers," wrote "Ward" one day,

> i wish you wood be more particlar abowt the spellin and punctooation. i dont ploom myself on my learnin, but i want you to distinkly understan that Artemus Ward has got sumthing in his hed besides lise. i shall be in Cleveland befour long and my hanbills shall certinly be struck off down to your offis.

But Ward never arrived in Cleveland, and Browne after three years departed for New York. His first book, which included many of his former Plain Dealer pieces, became a favorite with Abraham Lincoln, who read selections to his Cabinet.

Even as Browne exercised his fancy on the local scene, issues and events on the national level were stirring politics as well as journalism. Both the Democrats and especially the Whigs were torn by the slavery issue. Antislavery Whigs began supporting their own papers in competition with the more conservative Herald. One was the misleadingly named Daily True Democrat, which began in North Olmsted in 1846 but moved to Cleveland the following year. In 1852 Canadian-born Joseph Medill came from Cochocton to publish his Daily Forest City in Cleveland. The two antislavery Whig papers merged the following year as the Daily Forest City Democrat, with Medill joined as publisher by a printer from the True Democrat, Edwin Cowles. Early in 1855 the two publishers called a meeting of antislavery Whigs and Democrats in their newspaper office, which led to the formation of the Republican party. Cowles changed the paper's unwieldy name to the Cleveland Leader and moved from the printing room to the editor's desk after buying out Medill, who took his profits to Chicago and invested them in the Tribune.

Edwin W. Cowles, wrote one historian in 1910, "was the Horace Greeley of the west, the greatest editor Cleveland has ever produced." Raised in Ashtabula County, the most radical antislavery corner of Ohio, he came to Cleveland at 14 to learn the printer's trade. As editor of the Leader he bent his antislavery principles only once, advising the return of an escaped slave during the secession crisis in order to show the South that the Fugutive Slave Act, however hateful, could be enforced in the North. The South seceded anyway, and Cowles wasn't going to be gulled again. Within a week of the Union defeat at First Bull Run, he was advocating immediate emancipation by the Lincoln administration and pursued that policy throughout the Civil War. As editor of the city's major Republican newspaper, he was rewarded with the position of Postmaster of Cleveland. Regarding it as more than merely a political plum, he used it to inaugurate the nation's first home mail delivery system.

Following the Civil War, Cowles justified his paper's name as the pacesetter of Cleveland journalism. Its circulation of 13,000 in 1875 was double that of the Herald and several times that of the Plain Dealer, which had ceased publication for several weeks at the end of the war due to its Copperhead policies. In 1877 the Leader installed a perfecting press and printed its first Sunday edition. Cowles followed the Republican line on Reconstruction but balked at a third term for President Ulysses Grant.

Clean-shaven with a full mane of white hair, Cowles looked more like a village doctor than militant editor, but he carried a pistol on Cleveland's streets and practiced his marksmanship on a target hanging in his office, where he beat off an assailant on at least one occasion. "In newspaper fighting he considered the sladge hammer a more effective weapon than the rapier," eulogized the Plain Dealer, "and he went at a policy, or a rival paper with smashing blows instead of with keen thrusts." Once the rebellion had been put down, he directed the brunt of his blows at any efforts by Catholics to divert public funds to the support of parochial schools. On the positive side, he campaigned successfully for the construction of the Superior Viaduct.

While the Leader was at the peak of its hegemony, a scrawny upstart, its opposite in nearly every respect, hit the streets. The Leader was a full-sized sheet of seven columns in width; the newcomer only five columns wide, fifteen inches in length. The Leader carried twenty long columns of ads, the newcomer but five columns in all. It took three cents to buy a copy of the Leader, while the newcomer went for a single copper penny; its name, in fact, was the Penny Press. Its founder, E.W. Scripps, would spend less than three years in the city, but his upstart newspaper would dominate Cleveland journalism for nearly a century.

Edward Willis Scripps came to Cleveland from Detroit, where he had helped his older brother James establish the Detroit News. Only 24 years of age, he was a red-whiskered six-footer with a hereditary cast in his right eye, who claimed to consume four quarts of whiskey and forty Havana cigars a day. The Penny Press, his first independent venture in journalism, would be the first link in what would become one of the nation's most powerful newspaper chains: Scripps-Howard. From the beginning it professed to be independent politically, neither Republican nor Democrat (nor Prohibition, it might go without saying).

With its condensed format and affordable price, the Penny Press also set out to be a voice for the common workingman. "The Press was distinguished from its contemporaries in those days," recalled Scripps, "in that it suppressed nothing and published nothing to gain the favor and approval of those people in the community who flattered themselves that they were the better classes." When Leonard Case died unexpectedly, other papers said from heart disease, while the Press called it suicide. Against the request of its largest advertiser, the Press published news of his divorce suit. It even published the name of a young businessman cited by the ASPCA for driving a carriage with an improperly shod horse. The culprit's name was E.W. Scripps.

But the best example of Scripps' anti-establishmentarianism could be seen in his defiance of Henry Chisholm, head of Cleveland's largest steel company. It began as a case of mistaken identity, when a Penny Press reporter misidentified Chisholm's son as a man arrested for disorderly conduct. Chisholm lured the reporter to his office, where his workers covered him head to waist with black paint, and sued Scripps for criminal libel. Scripps retaliated by printing a full account of the affair headed "The Shame of Chisholm" and followed up by daily running a condensed version at the head of the Press editorial column. When Chisholm's doctors informed Scripps that the attacks were endangering their patient's health, the publisher refused to relent until Chisholm not only dropped his suit against the Press but paid $5,000 in damages to his reporter. Chisholm gave in but died nevertheless within a few weeks. "I believe that had I known that I was killing him at the time, I would have pursued the same course," Scripps wrote later. "Had I taken a pistol and shot him to death, I would have felt no more and no less responsibility for that death than I have ever since felt." Like Edwin Cowles, Scripps went about armed with a pistol; while Cowles practiced marksmanship in his office, Scripps practiced drawing quickly and shooting from the hip.

Not long after the Chisholm affair, Scripps left Cleveland for further journalistic ventures in St. Louis, Louisville, and other centers. He left the Penny Press in capable hands he had trained personally. By 1890 it had expanded in size and was known as the Cleveland Press, though its price held at one cent. Its circulation, growing apace with the population of an industrializing city, then stood at 43,510, several thousand more than the second-place Leader.

A major shake-up took place on Cleveland's newspaper row along Frankfort Avenue as the nineteenth century drew to a close. It was instigated by Liberty E. Holden, who had accumulated a fortune from real estate and western mining investments. As a Democrat and advocate for the western silver interests, Holden purchased the Cleveland Plain Dealer in 1885 to promote his political agenda. He then joined with the Cleveland Leader in buying the once dominant Herald. The Leader maintained the afternoon edition of the Herald as its own evening edition; the Plain Dealer buried the main morning edition of the Herald in order to facilitate its own reinvention as a morning daily. The final edition of the Herald contained its own obituary, which might also serve to mourn the passing of many other newspapers in future years:

> In closing the record of the HERALD we can justly claim it to have been a clean and honorable, as well as useful, record. It has devoted itself to building up the interests of the City, the State and the Nation. It has sought to deal justly with all men, poor and rich, friends and opponents alike. It has championed no cause that it did not believe just. It has endeavored to treat every person and every subject with courtesy and fairness. We know that in passing out of sight it will leave behind it a good name and thousands who will mourn its departure as that of an old, a trusted and a valued friend. That knowledge is a consolation, even in the bitterness of parting.

Even minus the Herald, Cleveland could greet the twentieth century as its golden age of journalism, with half a dozen daily newspapers. Leading the afternoon field was the Press with a circulation of 86,158, followed by the Recorder (30,000) and the World (24,843). In the morning the Leader claimed circulation of 63,228 (including its afternoon News and Herald edition), with the Plain Dealer trailing at 30,000. There was also a daily German-language newspaper, the Waechter und Anzeiger, with 24,320 readers.

Journalism had become a big business, requiring major outlays of capital, extensive printing plants, and sizable editorial and business staffs. As such, newspapers were becoming too large for the old style of personal journalism. Liberty Holden for several years tried running the Plain Dealer himself, installing the new linotype typesetting machines despite a printers' strike and boycott. By 1898, however, Holden turner over operation of the paper to two professional newspapermen, Elbert Baker and Charles Kennedy.

While personal journalism was becoming pass, political partisanship remained a visible fixture of journalism practice. Both the Press and the Plain Dealer were supporters of Cleveland's progressive mayor, Tom L. Johnson. As once observed by newspaper critic A.J. Liebling, "Freedom of the press belongs to those who own one." The Leader was owned by industrialist Charles A. Otis and Mark Hanna's son-in-law Myron McCormick, both bitterly opposed to Johnson. During the election of 1907 they brought in noted New York cartoonist Homer Davenport to lampoon Johnson in a series of front-page Leader cartoons, and James Donahey of the Plain Dealer responded in kind. Davenport may well have won the cartoon war, but Johnson won the election.

At the same time newspapers were beginning to subordinate political partisanship in favor of popular, nonpartisan civic crusades. When fireworks in a Cleveland five-and-dime store ignited a fire that claimed seven lives, the Plain Dealer began a "Sane Fourth" (of July) campaign which eventually led to state regulation of the fireworks trade. Another crusade by the morning daily helped to bring about a city manager form of government for Cleveland.

Carrying on in the tradition of E.W. Scripps, the afternoon Press continued to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. It followed up a tip in 1904 about the suspicious financial transactions of one Cassie Chadwick, a resident of Euclid Avenue's "Millionaires' Row." Its investigations uncovered evidence that the audacious lady had obtained large sums of money on the most dubious of collateral, including questionable securities and the groundless implication that she was Andrew Carnegie's illegitimate daughter. The exposures led to the suicide of one banker and the embarrassment of several others.

Meanwhile, the economic realities of modern journalism worked to narrow the playing field. The Recorder morphed into the Daily Legal News, a court reporter read mainly by lawyers. The World, Cleveland's nearest approach to "yellow" journalism (sample head: "Killed Her Stepdaughter, And Then Cracked Her Husband's Skull With an Ax"), was purchased by Charles Otis along with the News and Herald and consolidated into the Cleveland News. Otis then sold both the News and the Leader to Daniel R. Hanna, son of Mark Hanna. The Leader had,fallen far behind the Plain Dealer in circulation, however, and in 1917 Hanna sold it to his morning rival, keeping the afternoon News and continuing the Sunday Leader as the Sunday News-Leader. Burying the six-day Leader, the Plain Dealer then had the morning field to itself.

Following World War I, Cleveland's newspapers settled into a stasis that would endure for nearly half a century. By and large, they were a conservative lot; brash, jazzy tabloids were springing up elsewhere, but none would try the Cleveland market. Publisher William Randolph Hearst likewise never had a Cleveland outlet. One final attempt to start a new local morning daily was made in the 1920s, but despite financial backing from the Van Sweringens, the Cleveland Times lasted only five years. Only in the ethnic press was there appreciable growth during the period, as Czech, Hungarian, Slovenian, and Polish dailies joined the German Waechter und Anzeiger. By 1938 Cleveland could count fifty foreign-language papers including ten dailies; twenty years later assimilation and immigration quotas had reduced their number to eighteen, including only four dailies.

With its morning monopoly and conservative makeup, the Plain Dealer was the "gray lady" of the mainstream press. It maintained its own bureau in Washington, D.C., which helped make it Cleveland's "newspaper of record." In 1932 it reorganized itself into the Forest City Publishing Company to facilitate its purchase of the Cleveland News. It maintained the News as an independent afternoon daily, probably for its nuisance value against the Press, but killed the News-Leader, its only rival in the Sunday field. Unhappy with the increased government activity of the New Deal, the Plain Dealer in 1940 endorsed the first Republican Presidential candidate in its century-long history, Wendell Willkie.

Competition between the News and the Press livened things up in the afternoon field. Two former Chicagoans brought a "Front Page" flair to the Cleveland News. As circulation manager, Arthur McBride wasn't afraid to employ strong-arm tactics against the competition, which may have prepared him psychologically for his later formation of the Cleveland Browns. City editor A.E.M. Bergener in 1927--a year before a similar trick was depicted fictitiously on Broadway in The Front Page--actually located a fugitive embezzler but didn't turn him over to the law until he had milked him for several News "exclusives." The News was prized for its sports coverage, its early racing editions being especially popular on Short Vincent Street.

While the Press maintained a wide circulation advantage over the News, it experienced a major change of direction. In 1924 it endorsed neither the Republican nor Democratic candidate for President but the third-party Progressive Robert M. La Follette. But founder E.W. Scripps died the following year, and the Scripps-Howard chain fell under the direction of the much more conservative Roy Howard. Scripps-Howard papers were still allowed a degree of autonomy in local affairs, however, and in 1928 the Press got a young editor determined to make the most of that independence.

Prematurely bald and only a few inches above five feet in height, Louis B. Seltzer was raised in Cleveland's Archwood-Denison neighborhood. He dropped out of school in seventh grade to go to work, beginning as an office boy for the Leader before moving over to the Press. Just 31 when he assumed the editorship, "Louie" earned the affection of his staff as both instigator and butt of schoolboy office pranks. He never forgot--nor let others forget--his self-made beginnings. "My heart has always gone out to the children of the rich," he once wrote. "I feel for them."

Seltzer believed that newspapers had lost touch with their readers, and he set out to restore a personal relationship with the common people. "I went out into the neighborhoods, the stores, the saloons, the schools, the shops and offices of the town," he recalled. "The basic thing I discovered was that wanted a paper to be close to them, to be friendly--a paper that they could call on in emergencies and that would fight for them when they had trouble." To the top of the Press front page he raised the slogan, "The Newspaper That Serves Its Readers." He hired a Romanian immigrant, Theodore Andrica, and assigned him to Cleveland's nationalities beat. Andrica began making annual visits to Central and Eastern Europe, bearing messages from Clevelanders to relatives in the old country. During World War II the Press would fulfill its service objective by keeping a photo and data file on area servicemen, printing photos of their wives and infants and a weekly local news digest to be sent to them, and raising funds after the war for a War Memorial Fountain as testimonial to their sacrifices.

With its Associated Press franchise and special war correspondents, the Plain Dealer kept Clevelanders abreast of the World War II battlefronts. Roelif Loveland described D-Day from a bomber piloted by a Clevelander over the Allied beachhead. Gordon Cobbledick, a sports writer back home, reminded Americans that there was still a war going on in the Pacific despite celebrations over Germany's surrender:

> It was V-E Day at home, but on Okinawa men shivered in foxholes half filled with water and waited for the command to move forward across the little green valley that was raked from both ends by machine-gun fire....
>
> It was V-E Day everywhere, but on Okinawa the forests of white crosses grew and boys who had hardly begun to live died miserably in the red clay of this hostile land.

Both accounts were later included in the collection, A Treasury of Great Reporting.

Reporters and columnists had begun to shed their anonymity between the two world wars. Jack Raper skewered politicians in the Press, often simply by quoting them verbatim--alongside a standard icon he employed of a rampant bull, which came in several sizes to suit the outrageousness of the quote. W. Ward Marsh turned verbal thumbs up or down on movies for the Plain Dealer. Eleanor Clarage reported society doings for the Plain Dealer, Winsor French for the Press. Ed Bang and Ed McAuley headed the superb sports staff of the News. In 1953 Plain Dealer cartoonist Ed Kuekes brought Cleveland its first (and for half a century its only) Pulitzer Prize for an editorial cartoon depicting an American soldier old enough to die for his country in Korea but not yet old enough to vote.

In 1933 reporters from the Press and the News had demonstrated their growing power by organizing the country's first chapter of the Newspaper Guild, a labor union for editorial and business employees.

Louis Seltzer and the Cleveland Press emerged from World War II at the height of their dominance. Seltzer was called arguably "the best and most effective newspaper editor in America" by historian Bruce Catton, himself a former Plain Dealer reporter. To others he was simply "Mr. Cleveland." He and his paper were regarded a "kingmakers" in local politics, having successfully promoted the careers of Ohio Governor Frank Lausche and Cleveland Mayor Anthony Celebreeze. After the Press moved into a new building on Lakeside Avenue in 1959 there were tongue-in-cheek rumors of a secret tunnel under East 9th Street, through which mayors might pass from City Hall to get their marching orders from the Press editor.

Such power could come with a price. When the Press endorsed an extension of Clifton Boulevard through Seltzer's own Clifton Park neighborhood, the editor was denounced by some of his neighbors as a traitor even though the new road would abut his own backyard. His most controversial stand came in the Sheppard murder case of 1954, in which he unleashed the power of the Press against a Bay Village doctor suspected of killing his wife. When the wheels of justice-seemed to be turning a bit too leisurely, Seltzer himself wrote a series of signed front-page editorials under such inflammatory heads as "Somebody Is Getting Away With Murder," "Why Don't the Police Quiz No. 1 Suspect?", and "Quit Stalling and Bring Him In!" Sheppard was tried and convicted but later released on the basis of prejudicial publicity, then retried and acquitted.

In the meantime, however, Seltzer's Press had been named by Time magazine as one of the ten best newspapers in America, putting it in a class with such peers as the Baltimore Sun, The New York Times, and the Washington Post. When an indigent woman died alone in the city, said Time, she left a note addressed to the Press. "The only thing I own is my dog," read the note. "Please take it to the Press. I know the home they find will be a good one."

In its heady days of postwar supremacy, the most serious threat to the Press was neither the News nor Plain Dealer but the arrival of television. Scripps-Howard brought Cleveland its first television station in 1947. This was WEWS, which was soon followed by WNBK (now WKYC) and WXEL (now WJW). The latter in 1951 hired a Western Reserve University speech professor, Warren Guthrie, to deliver the news as the "Sohio Reporter." Working before the coming of teleprompters, Guthrie recited his fifteen-minute telecast from memory with the aid of only a few brief notes. He lasted for twelve years before being replaced by an anchor team.

Much longer-lived was the television career of Dorothy Fuldheim, who joined WEWS when she was 54, two months before the station signed on. She brought considerable experience as a lecturer, having acquired her material through interviews with such newsmakers as Adolf Hitler ("he didn't know I was Jewish"). At WEWS she became the first woman in the nation to have her own news show, a program of interviews and analysis. Barely five feet tall, she was nevertheless known as "Big Red" both for her flaming hairdo and take-no-prisoners style. In 1970 she threw hippie Jerry Rubin off her show in mid-program for his offensive manners but several weeks later cried on-air while defending the students after the Kent State shootings. She received mostly hostile feedback for that but also discovered a basket of flowers at her doorstep with a note from some students reading "We wept with you last night."* The only thing that could knock Big Red off the air was a stroke at the age of 91.

* Television, unfortunately, can leave a spotty paper (or even tape) trail. Transcripts of Fuldheim's commentaries were sometimes reproduced for viewers who requested them, but evidently a complete file was never assembled. WEWS eventually sent what they had to Kent State University, but ironically, it didn't seem to include the Kent State shooting script.

Television deprived newspapers of their news monopoly, especially those published in the afternoon. Whereas workingmen formerly would come home and pick up their evening paper after supper, now families would turn on the evening news after or even during supper. Afternoon papers began disappearing in city after city. In Cleveland the News was never able to achieve even half the circulation of the Press, and the Plain Dealer finally sold it to its afternoon rival in 1960. For a year or two the surviving evening daily was published as the Cleveland Press and News, but the name "News" got smaller and smaller and finally vanished altogether. The Plain Dealer used the occasion to move from its building at Superior and East 6th (present site of the Cleveland Public Library's Stokes wing) down the street to the former News plant at 18th and Superior.

Under a young new publisher, the Plain Dealer began to cast off its stodgy gray image. Thomas Vail took over the reins of his great grandfather Liberty Holden's paper and set out to brighten up its makeup and lighten up its reporting and editorials. In 1964 the Plain Dealer endorsed its first Democrat for President in twenty-four years, Lyndon Johnson. Later its full-page endorsement would help Carl Stokes become the first African American mayor of a major American city.

Newsweek magazine in 1965 praised the paper's "tigerish" attitude. With a circulation within 5,000 copies of its rival, the Plain Dealer was poised to challenge the Press on its own terms. When the Holden heirs decided to sell the paper to the Newhouse chain in 1967, it brought a record price of $54.2 million and had little effect on the paper's editorial policy. During the Vietnam War the Plain Dealer was the first newspaper in the country to publish pictures of American atrocities at My Lai.

Though elimination of the News had given the Press a spike in circulation, in the long run it couldn't compensate for the indigenous problems of an evening newspaper. Cleveland's third and longest newspaper strike in 1962 shut both of its papers down for 129 days, but the Press emerged with a circulation loss nearly three times that of the Plain Dealer. By 1970, not long after the retirement of Louis Seltzer, the Press trailed its morning adversary by nearly 25,000 copies. It may have been a writers' paper, as exemplified by columnists Don Robertson and Dick Feagler, but it was becoming less and less of a readers' paper. ("Newspapermen's newspapers," as an editor of the defunct New York Herald Tribune once observed, "always seem to fold.")

Even as the Press observed its one hundredth birthday with a special Centennial Edition in 1978, there were signs that Scripps-Howard intended to sell it or fold it. Two years later, after negotiating concessions from its unions, Cleveland businessman Joseph E. Cole purchased the Press in a last-ditch effort to save it. His rescue measures included the introduction of a Sunday edition followed by that of a morning edition. Neither availed, and the Press printed its final edition on June 17, 1982. For the first time since the early days of the Cleveland Herald, Cleveland was a one-newspaper town. The fact that it had plenty of company in such places as Denver, Columbus, and Atlanta, did little to ease the withdrawal pains of newspaper addicts.

Some of the news void in print was filled by the appearance of alternative newspapers. Designed to provide readers with news and opinions not generally covered by mainstream media, they were usually of tabloid or smaller size and appeared weekly or less frequently. One of the earliest and most outspoken was Point of View, a bi-weekly newsletter published on a shoestring by Roldo Bartimole, a former Plain Dealer reporter. It was largely a one-man operation that gloried in the Socratic role of "a gadfly on the body politic." Objects of his exposure ranged from City Hall to Bartimole's former employer, the Plain Dealer. While its subscribers never numbered more than a few hundred, they included a heavy proportion of the area's opinion and decision makers.

Somewhat more traditional in appearance and approach was the Cleveland Edition, a free weekly tabloid founded by former teacher Bill Gunlocke in the wake of the demise of the Press. Its staff included Bartimole, former Press writer Doug Clarke, and humorist Eric Broder. Like Point of View, its editorial policy tended to be anti-establishmentarian. Its exclusive reliance on advertising revenue proved to be its downfall, and the Edition ceased publication in 1992. Another alternative weekly, the Free Times, took over where the Edition left off but after a few years met the same fate. It merged into the Scene, originally an entertainment weekly that survives as Cleveland's principal alternative newspaper.

City Magazines also helped to fill the information void left by the disappearance of afternoon dailies. Cleveland's principal representative was the eponymous Cleveland Magazine, launched in 1972 by publishers Oliver Emerson and Lute Harmon. "The whole idea was to do stories nobody else was doing," said Michael Roberts, the editor for 17 years. A notable example was a 10,000-word article on the mayoral administration of Dennis Kucinich by Frank Kuznik in 1978. By the turn of the millennium, however, serious journalism tended to become secondary to such "lifestyle" features as "Best Suburbs," "Best Schools," and "Best Restaurants."

As Cleveland's sole surviving daily, the Plain Dealer prospered in the 1990s. It replaced hot type with computer-set printing and increased its editorial staff from 270 to 400. In 1994 it opened a new $200 million production and distribution center in suburban Brook Park, where four huge Goss presses could each turn out 75,000 copies an hour featuring full-color reproductions. Editorial and business staffs remained at a remodeled Superior Avenue building, from where pages were fiber-optically transmitted to the Brook Park plant.

Editorially, the Plain Dealer compiled a rather mixed record of victory and defeat. Its music critic carried on such a relentlessly adverse campaign against a new Cleveland Orchestra conductor that he was finally removed from the beat. In a one-newspaper town the power of the press needed to be used but not abused. While the Plain Dealer may have been somewhat tardy in addressing corruption in Cuyahoga County government, its subsequent focus on the issue helped bring about not only retribution but reform. And finally, the paper's long drought ended when columnist Connie Schultz won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 2005, the paper's first Pulitzer in half a century. Even this had a downside, however, as Schultz afterwards turned in her resignation in order to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest due to her marriage to U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown.

With the turn of the millenium in 2000, the Plain Dealer discovered that technology could be a double-edged sword. On the one hand it enabled the paper to print electronically in color, but on the other it empowered a young generation to bypass hard copy altogether and obtain their information electronically. The internet posed a more critical threat to newspapers than television ever did. Along with other newspapers across the country the Plain Dealer began losing readers, which, exacerbated by the collapse of the economy in 2008, resulted in a loss of advertising.

Advertising generally has been an even more vital part of newspaper revenue than subscriptions, which is why editors have often been more fearful of offending advertisers than readers. Circulation figures traditionally have been important to newspapers chiefly as a means of setting advertising rates: the more readers, the higher the ad rates. E.W. Scripps had dreamed of putting out a newspaper free of advertising, reasoning that

> If the public would insist on paying the publishers of the daily. . .journals the full cost of producing the same, plus a profit, so that a would-be honest publisher would not be compelled to depend for his existence upon the good will and patronage of the advertiser, there would be a chance at least of our having a less dishonest press.

Scripps actually tried such an adless newspaper in Chicago, but World War I helped put an end to the experiment. In the century or so since Scripps, newspapers have still failed to find a substitute for advertising.

Most dailies, including the Plain Dealer, have made efforts to capture internet readers by offering digital samplings of their print editions, but they've yet to attract enough advertisers to pay the costs. They are also trying to figure out how to persuade digital readers to pay for their electronic product, when nearly everything else on the Internet is available at no extra cost. Some newspapers began erecting "firewalls" after their first few stories, beyond which readers would have to subscribe for more. The Plain Dealer set up a website, Cleveland.com, containing stories from its own paper and other sources, but offered it free of charge.

Around the beginning of 2013, the Plain Dealer appeared to be approaching a crisis that threatened its very existence, at least as readers knew it. Advance Publications, the newspaper branch of the Newhouse organization, had trimmed back its papers in several cities from daily to three-times-a-week publications. The hit list was headed by the venerable New Orleans Times-Picayune, which suggested that the Plain Dealer itself might soon be under the gun. Plain Dealer employees, with backing from the Newspaper Guild and the Communications Workers of America, launched a public campaign to save their daily. Besides a television commercial, their efforts included a Facebook page (fighting fire with fire?) and a petition that collected more than 7,000 signatures.

A reprieve came in April of that year, when editor Debra Adams Simmons announced at a newsroom meeting that the Plain Dealer would remain a seven-day newspaper. It was not a total victory, however, as the paper would cut back on home delivery sometime that summer to four days a week. On the week's remaining three days, readers might either pick up their "PD" at a newstand or subscribe to a new e-edition--"a digital version of the newspaper itself." One other cost of survival would be a further reduction of the news staff: already down to little more than 160, another 52 would have to go.

Such is the state of print journalism in Cleveland, nearly two centuries after the first appearance of hard copy. What began with a single voice in the wilderness, followed by dozens of successors of various sizes and quality, has come down again to basically a single lone survivor, the Plain Dealer. True, that survivor retains a far from negligible 300,000 readers, but that is no guarantee of existence in an era of rapidly changing methods of communication.

Are those remaining readers a dying breed, or can print journalism attract new generations to the smell of newsprint? And if newsprint is to be replaced by some form of cybercommunication, will the new system possess the authority of a tightly edited metropolitan newspaper? Will it have sufficient resources to expose future Watergates, Pentagon Papers, or Cuyahoga County corruption?

More importantly, would a digital daily feel a responsibility to fulfill the historical role of American journalism as the "Fourth Branch of Government"? One regional publisher who keenly felt that responsibility was John S. Knight, who parlayed his Akron Beacon Journal into the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain. "As responsible purveyors of information and opinion," wrote Knight,, "our newspapers are committed to the philosophy that journalism is likewise a public trust, an institution which serves, advances, and protects the public welfare."

In the past, newspapers have formed uniquely personal relationships with their readers, who have taken their passing like the death of a friend or a relative. That has not prevented the death of some great papers, however, whenever their circulation has fallen below a critical mass. When the Chicago Daily News folded some thirty-five years ago, one of its writers wondered even then whether print journalism was an endangered species. "If the public can tolerate a Chicago without a paper like the Daily News--and apparently it can--then clearly our society is not functioning at the high pitch of informed civility that Jefferson envisioned," wrote David Elliott. "But then Jefferson never imagined Chicago, or television, or mass advertising, or the combustion car and its stepchild of exurban sprawl."

Or computers and the internet, we might add. It was Jefferson, too, who once said that if he had to make a choice between having "a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government," he wouldn't hesitate to opt for newspapers. If newspapers are a dying breed, we had better come up with their equivalent.